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NO 12

GOCE DELCEV UNIVERSITY - STIP  
FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

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## ATTITUDES TO POETRY IN THE ANTIQUITY AND TO DRAMATIC POETRY IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

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**Abstract:** This paper offers an outline on how poetry was perceived in Antiquity, how it was opposed to philosophy and what was its impact on the emotions. In addition, this paper will outline the major attitudes to poetry in Renaissance England. The main opposition to poetry in Renaissance England arose due to its incompatibility with Christian doctrine and precepts. Again, one of the main reasons for disparaging poetry is due to the fact that it appeals to and emphasizes certain emotions which, according to Christianity, are to be avoided due to their insidious and unholy nature. In addition, the paper looks at how Shakespeare might have looked at the notion of the poet by reiterating the ancient adage that Poetry is a sort of "divine madness". The paper ends with William Wordsworth's view on Poetry and his advice on how Poetry might be beneficial, instead of detrimental, for the readers and for the audience.

**Key words:** *poetry, philosophy, emotions, Christianity, virtue, vice*

"In the present stage of the human mind, poetry and other forms of fiction may certainly be regarded as a good. But we can also imagine the existence of an age in which a severer conception of truth has either banished or transformed them. At any rate we must admit that they hold a different place at different periods of the world's history. In the infancy of mankind, poetry, with the exception of proverbs, is the whole of literature, and the only instrument of intellectual culture; in modern times she is the shadow or echo of her former self, and appears to have a precarious existence."<sup>1</sup>

### Attitudes to poetry in antiquity

Plato (428/427- 348/347 BC) looked at poetry and drama from an idealistic perspective. From the outset in Book X from *The Republic*, Plato announces his main theme with regard to poetry: "Many things pleased me in the order of our State, but there was nothing which I liked better than the regulation about poetry" (*The Republic*, Book X, 595).

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<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Dialogues*, vol. 3, 3rd edition 1892, p.110



Regulation is necessary because “all poetical imitations are ruinous to the understanding of the hearers, and that the knowledge of their true nature is the only antidote to them.” (Book X, 595) That is so, because Plato analyses poetry through the prism of virtue and truth. In *Book X*, Plato, through the mouth of Socrates, disapproves poetry as it is an imitation, branding it as ruinous to the understanding of the hearers and recommends as an antidote the “knowledge of their true nature” (Book X, 595). In his words the tragic poet is an imitator and thus is thrice removed from the king and truth. They are thrice removed from the truth because they “copy images” (Book X, 600) and never reach the truth. Socrates questions the contribution that poets make in the state and more importantly questions whether they make mankind virtuous. Socrates continues his diatribe by emphasising the tools that poets use to make poetry sweeter and more attractive, such as: words, phrases, metre, harmony and rhythm pointing out how “poor appearance” (Book X, 601) poetry makes when stripped of these “colours” (Book X, 601). Moreover, for him poetry as an imitation is only a play or sport, and the tragic poets are “imitators in the highest degree” (Book X, line 602). Socrates goes on to describe how poets, by appealing to our “sympathetic element” (Book X, 606) break lose our emotions which are normally kept under control in our own calamities. The spectator feels that there is no disgrace in “praising and pitying” (Book X, 606) anyone who recounts how good man he is or how troubled he is. However, the downside is that the evil and sorrow of other men is “with difficulty repressed in our own” (Book X, 606). The same is valid for comedy, as the jests that people would normally been ashamed by, when performed, people are amused by them. In Socrates’ words, by the same token the other passions such as: desire, pain and pleasure are enhanced by poetry instead of “drying them up” (Book X, 606). In short, poetry prompt us to act in an irrational way by appealing to our inferior rather to our best part and the imitative poet puts a bad constitution in the soul of each individual by making images that are far removed from the truth and by gratifying the irrational part., whereas an Ideal State should be guided by Reason. As in *The Republic* the rulers should be law and reason, If Homer is allowed in pleasures and pain will be the rulers in our State. As a consequence, in Plato’s *Republic*, “we must inform him (the pantomimic actor, but this is also valid for Homer and for poets in general) that in our State such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland of wool upon his head, we shall send him away to another city” (Book III, 398). For Plato, philosophy and poetry are opposed. He states that “We will remind her(poetry) that there is an ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy” (Book, X, 607). Poets are makers, as the Greek verb *poiein* means, whereas philosophers are discovering the existing truth. Thus, poetry is concerned with becoming and philosophy with being. For Plato, Poetry is not the truth, and the stake for is no less than “the good or evil of the human soul” (Book, X, 608). In addition, the poetry/philosophy opposition conjures up other dichotomies such as: imagination vs. reason and emotion vs. principle. To sum up, according to Plato, in an ideal state, only hymns to the Gods and praises of famous men ought to be admitted. Furthermore, as Aristotle, Plato describes poetry as a kind of madness: “The third kind is the madness of those who are possessed by the Muses; which taking hold of a delicate and virgin soul, and there inspiring frenzy, awakens lyrical and all other numbers; with these adorning the myriad actions of ancient heroes for the instruction of posterity. But he who, having no touch of the Muses’ madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art—he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman.”(Phaedrus) For Plato, there are four kinds of divine madness: “prophetic, initiatory, poetic, erotic, having four gods presiding over them; the first was the inspiration of Apollo, the second that of Dionysus, the third that of the Muses, the fourth that of

Aphrodite and Eros.” Plato was opposed to Poetry to its degeneration in his own day and due to the fact that actors were regarded as degradation of human nature, since in one man in his life one cannot play many parts. It comes as no surprise that in his *Protagoras*, he says that the poets were the Sophists of their day.

For Plato’s disciple, Aristotle (384–322 BC), epic poetry, tragedy, comedy including the dythyrambic poetry and the music of the flute and the lyre are all “modes of imitation” (The Poetics, p.7). For Aristotle the reason for the appearance of poetry lies in our nature. According to him two of our instincts are responsible for the emergence of poetry: the instinct of imitation and the instinct of our nature or the instinct of harmony and rhythm. In his view the instinct of imitation is intrinsic to humans, it is instilled in the childhood, as the child “learns at first by imitation” (The Poetics, p.8). And since everyone is not philosopher to learn as philosophers do, in seeing a likeness ordinary men make inferences. However, the pleasure they get does not derive from the imitation itself, but rather from the “execution, the colouring or some other cause” (The Poetics, p.10). One of the goals of tragedy (or comedy and quite possibly other artistic forms)<sup>2</sup> is to achieve “catharsis”. Merriam Webster defines “catharsis” as “the purification and purgation of emotions—particularly pity and fear—through art”. Thus, Aristotle looks and analyses poetry through the prism of emotions. In addition, for Aristotle “poetry demands a man with special gift for it, or else one with a touch of madness in him” (The Poetics, p. 21). In the one case a man can take the mould of any character; in the other, he is lifted out of his proper self. For Aristotle, as opposed to Plato, poetry is truer than history, because the first is concerned with the universals and the latter with the particulars. As a consequence, “poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history” (The Poetics, p. 14). Aristotle refers to Homer as a sort of a teller of noble lies because in his words “Homer more than any other has taught the rest of us the art of framing lies in the right way” (The Poetics, p. 25). The reason, according to Aristotle, lies in the notion that people tend to make false inferences. In other words, by knowing the second to be true, falsely infer that the first is true also.

Both Plato and Aristotle view poetry as an imitation. Whereas Plato regards the poetry-emotion nexus as insidious, because poetry appeals to the irrational part of our soul, stirring the emotions, Aristotle views the poetry-emotion link as beneficial as it leads to the purgation of the emotions.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 BC –43 BC), who sided mostly with the Stoics, took Plato’s position on the role of Poetry in society. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, Cicero continues his diatribe on poets by questioning: “But do you not see how much harm is done by poets” (Tusculan Disputations, Book II On bearing pain, Ch. IX). On the one hand they present the bravest men as lamenting, thus softening our minds and on the other hand they are so entertaining that the same events are engraved in our memory. In Cicero’s view the combination of lack of discipline at home and the influence of the poets results in the deprivation of virtue of all its “vigor and energy” (Book II On bearing pain, Ch. IX).

In Cicero’s words the cause for all πάθος or distemper lies in opinion. He further calls it disorder of the mind. These disorders are motions of the mind “excited by an opinion of either good or evil” (Tusculan Disputations, Book III, On grief of mind, Ch. XI). Cicero

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<sup>2</sup> Scheff, T. J. (1979). *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual, and Drama*. University of California Press. ISBN 0-595-15237-6.

names four perturbations proceeding from our opinions of good and evil. Cicero further call these opinions: an imagined good and an imagined evil. Joy, that is “elated beyond measure”, Book III, On grief of mind, Ch. XI) and lust, “an immoderate inclination after some conceived great good”, (Book III, On grief of mind, Ch. XI) proceed from our opinion of good or imagined good. Our opinion of the evil/imagined evil, produces two perturbations, fear and grief. Cicero describes fear as “an opinion of some great evil impending over us” (Book III, On grief of mind, Ch. XI) and grief “as an opinion of some great evil present” (Book III, On grief of mind, Ch. XI). Cicero is of the opinion that “we should do our utmost effort to oppose these perturbations” (Book III, On grief of mind, Ch. XI). As Aristotle, he deals with the emotions of pity and fear. He opposes the view that fear and pity are natural as the latter “incites us to hasten to the assistance of others” (Book IV, Ch. XX) and “that he who should take away fear, would take away all industry in life” (Book IV, Ch. XX). To counter their claims that they are natural, Cicero cites Zeno the Stoic who gives definition that “a perturbation is a commotion of the mind against nature, in opposition to right reason; or, more briefly, thus, that a perturbation is a somewhat too vehement appetite; and when he says somewhat too vehement, he means such as is at a greater distance from the constant course of nature.” (Book IV, Ch. XXI).

Horace (65 BC –8 BC), in his *Ars Poetica*, besides some practical advises to poets on how to write good poetry, advances his view on how poetry affects our emotions. In his opinion “as the human face smiles at a smile, so it echoes those who weep” (*Ars Poetica*, lines 101, 2012). He emphasizes the effect of the spectacle as “the mind is stirred less vividly by what’s heard than by what eyes reliably report” (lines 181, 182). His advice to the Chorus is that it should favor the good, give friendly advice, guide the angered, encourage the fearful, praise sound laws and justice, and pray to the gods that “the proud lose their luck, and the wretched regain it” (line 202). Horace states that poets “wish to benefit or to please, or to speak what is both enjoyable and helpful to living” (lines 333, 334). In his view the poet “who can blend usefulness and sweetness wins every Vote, at once delighting and teaching the reader” (lines 343-344). The last quotation is known as the Horatian platitude. A similar opinion is expressed in Plato’s *Republic*: “Let them (lovers of poetry) show not only that she is pleasant but also useful to States and to human life, and we will listen in a kindly spirit; for if this can be proved we shall surely be the gainers—I mean, if there is a use in poetry as well as a delight?” (Book X, 607)

### **Attitude to dramatic poetry and plays in Renaissance England**

The question of the significance, influence and role of poetry in society was also a thorny issue in Renaissance England. Whereas the pagan Plato and Cicero disregarded theatre, drama and poetry on philosophical and moral grounds, in Christian and Protestant England the attack was based mostly on theological and moral grounds. As the heir of the medieval miracle plays, the Puritans regarded Renaissance drama simultaneously as heathen and Catholic. Thus in their opinion it was twice removed from true religion. Furthermore, as heathen it was idolatrous. As the bishop of Carthage Cyprian has declared: “Idolatry is the mother of all public amusements”. The cleric, academic and poet William Crashaw attacks plays as heathen, devilish and popish in his sermon preached at Paul’s cross, 14 February, 1607:

*“The ungodly Playes and Enterludes so rife in this nation, what are they but a bastard of Babylon, a daughter of error and confusion, a hellish device (the devils own recreation to mock at holy things) by him delivered to the heathen, from them to papist and from them to us”.* The cleric, academic and poet William Crashaw

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Many of the calamities that struck England in this period were seen as God's wrath and retribution for the existence of playhouses. This aspect was particularly exploited when the frequent guest, the plague, visited London. As the clergymen Thomas White (c.1550–1624) pronounced in his *A Sermon preached at Pawles Crosse on Sunday the ninth of December, 1576*: "*the cause of playes is sinne, if you look to it well: and the cause of sinne are playes: therefore the cause of plagues are playes.*" (*Complete Works of Shakespeare* 2008, p.44). With regard to the moral objections it was already mentioned that plays were regarded as heathen. As such they contained many practices that can lead to riots and licentiousness. Authors such as Montaigne, Jean Bodin and Juan de Mariana wrote books where they treat theatre and plays unfavorably. The moving force against the stage were the Puritans, who advanced their attacks through preachers, pamphleteers and civic authorities. Whereas the civic authorities and the lord mayor strived continually to keep actors out of the city, the court party provided support for the acting companies by acting as patrons. This battle between the city and the stage continued and resulted with frequent and temporary prohibition and authorization of plays. The first theatre building, The Theatre, was built in "the field to the north" of the city of London and out of its jurisdiction in 1576. The puritans aimed at abolishment but ended with regularization of plays.

The following year in 1577, the preacher John Northbrooke wrote: *A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes*. Written in a form of dialogue between the characters of *Age* and *Youth* it expressly states it is written against the plays performed in the aforementioned The Theatre and The Curtain, which opened in the year the treatise was written. After describing plays as works of the Satan to ensnare men and women into "concupiscence and filthy lusts of wicked whoredom" (*A Treatise Against Dicing, Dancing, Plays, and Interludes, with Other Idle Pastimes*, 1577, p.3), he enumerates a number of pagan, Old Testament and Christian teachers with examples and sayings that show the wickedness of plays. Northbrooke states the example of the religious counselor to Constantine I, Lactantius who advised that "*all such spectacles and shows are to be avoided, not only because vices shall not enter our hearts and breasts, but also lest the custom of pleasure should touch us, and convert us thereby both from God and good works*" (p.4). Through the character of *Age*, Northbrooke cites Valerius Maximus by stating that in his opinion practicing plays "*is not only a dishonest and wicked occupation, but also to behold it, and therein to delight, is a shameful thing, because the delight of a wanton mind is an offence*" (p.7). Taking St. Paul first epistle to the Corinthians 15:33 "Evil company corrupts good habits.", *Age* affirms that "evil speaking corrupts good manners" (p.8). *Age* describes the spectators as delighting in "vanity" and leaving "verity" (p.8). Furthermore, *Age* describes players as "crocodiles which devour the pure chastity both of single and married persons, men and women, when as in their plays you shall learn all things that appertain to craft, mischief, deceits, and filthiness. (p.9)" *Age* enumerates all the evil manners that one could obtain from attending plays, such as: deceiving, lying, swearing, murdering, rebelling against princes, ransacking cities, being idle, blaspheming, being proud, deriding any nation etc. *Age* associates plays and playhouses with the deadly sins of: pride, idleness, lust and envy, saying that "one vice nourished another". If our "affections and wicked concupiscence overcome reason" (p.10), it is no wonder and men would behave like beast and "follow all carnal pleasures" (p.10). However, Northbrooke through the

mouth of *Age*, states six conditions under which plays, in this case comedies are permissible for a schoolmaster to practice his scholars. These conditions are: they should be free of ribaldry and filthy terms and words, they should be in Latin and very seldom in English language, they should be performed rarely, they should not be decked up in sumptuous apparel, they should not be performed for profit but for learning, and that they should not be mixed with “vain and wanton toys of love” (p.15).

The next attack on poetry and other entertainers came two years later in 1579. It came from the pen of Stephen Gosson and it was entitled: *The School of Abuse, containing a plesaunt invective against poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters and such like Caterpillers of a commonwealth etc.* (1579) Gosson dedicated this pamphlet to Master Phillip Sidney. In the very first chapter, Gosson compares poetry with poison that is spread all over the world by poets. Next, Gosson describes poets as masters of disguise by comparing them to deceivers, and turns on its head Horace’s platitude that the role of poetry is to delight and instruct. From his point of view poets use ornaments to embellish their works, i.e, to achieve delight which enables them to sell them without arising suspicion. In such manner, In Gosson’s view, characters in the poems conceal their mischievous deeds. He further states that if we pull out the mask and unmask them we shall perceive theirs: disgrace (*reproch*) vanity, wantonness and folly. In Gosson’s view, Plato was right to banish them from the commonwealth, because they are “effeminate writers, unprofitable members, and utter enemies to virtue” (p.11). Gosson describes the insidious nature of Poetry by narrating the way that those who are thought the art pass gradually from piping to playing, from playing to pleasure, from pleasure to sloth, from sloth to sleep, from sleep to sin, from sin to death, and finally from death to the devil. Gosson contrast the poetry of his time with the poetry of ancient time, saying that in ancient times it was used to retell the notable “worthy captains, the wholesome councils of good fathers and virtuous lives of predecessors” (p.15) at solemn feasts, that way keeping the hearers away from drinking too much. In Gosson’s view poets hurt the conscience by employing melody to arouse the hearing, costly apparel to appeal to the sight, effeminate gesture to ravish the sense and wanton speech to turn desire to lust. That way through the ears, the effects pass on to the heart, then to the mind where “reason and virtue” (p.22) reside. However, despite these rebukes Gosson, like Nothbrooke before him, is of the opinion that under some conditions certain plays are commendable on moral grounds.

In 1579, Thomas Lodge published a treatise *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays* answering the objections put forward by Gosson. On the charges that poets create paltry toys, tending to foolishness and accomplishing nothing, Lodge reminds us that Aeneas in Virgil portrays a diligent captain, with the help of “byrds, beasts and trees the follies of the world are disiphered” (p.4), the creation is portrayed through the image of Prometheus and the fall of pride through Narcissus. Since according to Seneca the study of poets is to make children ready to understand wisdom, in Lodge’s view, Gosson does not comply with the precept and he compares him with oyster who doesn’t receive air while he swims. In likewise manner Gosson does not receive instruction while reading poetry. Lodge, reiterates Gosson’s view that poets are eloquent but wanton, write of no wisdom, their tales being frivolous, profaning holy things and that they do not seek to perfect our souls. To this objection, Lodge cites Horace’s *Ars Poetica*, namely that Orpheus with the help of poetry overcame tigers and lions, and that Amphion with the help of his lute and speech put the stones where he wanted. In short in Lodge’s view, poets were the creators of cities, writers of good laws, maintainers of religion, disturbers of the wicked, promoters of the well-disposed, inventors of laws, and the footpaths to knowledge and understanding. With regard to the way we perceive poetry, Lodge states that it is up to the audience to choose what to



see and what to receive. He compares poetry with a flower, out of which the bee produces honey and the spider poison. Lodge repeats Cicero's view that comedies are *an imitation of life, a mirror of customs, an image of truth*. Lodge goes on to describe the practices of Roman theatre, and draws a comparison with the old poets stating that the poets in England "apply their writing to people's vain" (p.27) and that they represent "small spectacles of folly" (p.27). Lodge does not agree with Gosson that "unless the thing be taken away the vice will continue" (p.27), but instead pleads for bringing "those things on stage that were altogether tending to virtue" (p.27). For Lodge, it is a "pity to abolish the thing which has so great virtue in it, because it is abused. (p.28)"

The next attack on the stage and theatre came in 1580, when the poet Anthony Munday published his tract *A second and third blast of retreat from plaies and Theaters*. The first blast was Gosson's School of Abuse. It is the most theologically based as the word *God* occurs 184 times, *Lord* 51 times, *Christ* 23, *Savior* 5 times, *Christian/ Christians* 17, *Devil* 22 times, *Satan* 7 times. Munday, using verses from the Scripture and relying on his own judgment posits that plays act against the will of God and play into the hands of Devil. For him if the English do not shun plays, they will end if not into the hands of foreign enemies, then surely into the hands of their spiritual adversaries: The Pope or the Devil. To describe plays and theatre he uses words and phrases such as: abomination, odious, pestilence, filthy speech, vile motions, beastly gestures, and horrible filthiness. For Munday, other vices are less pernicious because they only hurt the doer, whereas plays hurt both the beholders and the hearers. In Munday's opinion "God is offended as the Diuel is fed by Theatres" (p.6). Munday regards seeing plays as an "Apostasie from the faith" (p.13) and regards plays as "works of the Devil" (p.13). His next objection to the plays is that people flock in greater numbers to the Theatre than to the Church, preferring pastimes before the Church, leaving the sacrament "to feed the eyes with the impure and whorish sight of most filthy pastime." For Munday, plays are "mockery of religion" (p.32), and playgoers by laughing at filthy and abominable things commit sins, which turn out to be the most pestilent in the end. As theatre is consecrated to idols, in Munday's view it offends God. Munday advocates a return to the "house of Lord" (p.39) through a renunciation of the former wickedness of their lives, and a "holie warre against al vncleaness" (p.39) by shunning the "madness of stages" (p.39) and abhor "the filthiness of plaies" (p.39) and offering themselves wholly unto God, so that they would attain "perpetual protection" (p.40). In his view plays are not to be permitted in a Christian state, because they are "publike enimies to vir[tue] & religion; allurements vnto sinne; corrupters of good manners" (p.43). Furthermore, plays bring "bring both the Gospel into slander; the Sabbath into contempt; mens soules into danger; and finalie the whole Commonweale into disorder." (p.44). For Munday, part of the danger comes from the fact that people are "naturalie of our selues euil and corrupt" (p.44) and "blinded with our owne affections," (p.44) and the fact that "euerie man conceaueth of the goodnes or badnes of a thing according as it seemeth in his owne opiniō" (p.46). The ambush is that "neuertheles the opinions of the rude multitude are not alwaies the soundest" (p.47). Their opinions are "are mooued with vnconstant motions" (p.47), often liking "they like of that which is most hurtful; and dislike that which is most profitable" (p.47). He calls people opinions "vaine opinions" (p.50), stating that only with the help of God we are able to distinguish "profitable from hurtful things" (p.50). In his view the greatest liar has become the "best poet" (p.104). The author that can "can make the most notorious lie, and disguise falshood in such sort, that he maie passe vnperceaued, is held the best writer" (p.104). However, Munday admits that some authors works are profitable and "deserue commendation." (p.107). Munday next compares the force that the words uttered by the preacher and the words uttered by the "prophane plaier" (p.114) to move men unto virtue. He states that preacher's words are words of truth, whereas player's words are uttered in "vttered in scorning sort, interlaced



with filthie, lewde, & vngodlie speeches” (p.114). He thus concludes that he doesn’t believe players words have a greater force to move men unto virtue. Finally, he concludes that “the principal end of all their interludes is to feede the world with sights, & fond pastimes; to iuggle in good earnest the monie out of other mens purses into their owne hands” (p.115-116).

Sir Phillip Sidney, endeavored in his work, *An Apology of Poetry* (written c.1579, published in 1595), to defend poetry from the attacks and to raise it from the state of being considered “the laughing stock of children” (*Criticism: The Major Texts, An Apology of Poetry*, 1952, p.110)) from being “thrown down to so ridiculous an estimation (p.113)” and having a reputation “as the mountebanks of Venice” (p.139). To achieve this Sidney starts by pointing out that in fact poetry that poetry fed the other branches and sciences or as he calls the “tougher knowledges” (p.110). He justifies his view by stating that the first recorded books in Ancient Greece were written by no other than poets, naming Museaus, Homer and Hesiod. In his view all vocations, with the exception of the poet, are constrained and depend on Nature and can build upon Nature. The poet on the other hand, disdains to be tied to its constraints and is “lifted up with the vigor of his own invention” creates another nature, that is another world. He either creates things that are better than those found in nature or creates new ones. Although the poet goes “hand in hand with Nature” (p.113) is not limited “freely ranging only within the zodiac of his own wit” (p.113). Sidney’s words the world created by poetry is “a rich tapestry (p.113)” than the one created by Nature. In short, according to Sidney, Nature’s world is brazen, Poetry’s world is golden.

Sidney endeavors to compare the poet primarily with the historian and the philosopher. Sidney describes the historian as building his authority on books written “upon the notable foundation of hearsay (p.117)” and as being “tied to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things” (p.119). The philosopher on the other hand teaches obscurely, setting down the bare rule with thorny arguments, and is misty to be conceived, so that only learned men can understand him, that is those that are already learned. His knowledge is based on the abstract and general that happy should be those that can apply what he teaches. According to Sidney, the philosopher teaches through precept and the historian by example. But since both lack one quality, are incomplete and thus fail in their mission. In Sidney’s view the poet accomplished both by giving “a perfect picture” (p.119) of what the philosopher says should be done by one that is presupposed to have done it “by coupling the general notion with the particular example” (p.119). Only the “speaking picture of poesy” (p.119) can illuminate and figure forth the wisdom of philosophy. On the other hand, History, acquaints us with the particular now whereas the poetry acquaints us with the “universal consideration” (p.121). The major constrain of the historian is that he is bound by to describe things as they were, the poet on the other hand can be liberal. The historian knowledge of an example only “informs a conjectured likelihood” (p.121), the poet on the other hand can “frame his example to that which is most reasonable” (p.122). Sidney pursues his *Apology*, by stating the main objections that the *Mysomousoi* or poet-haters have against poetry. These objections are: firstly, that there are better sciences than poetry, secondly that poetry is the mother of lies, thirdly that poetry is the nurse of abuse and source for inducing pestilent desires, and lastly and chiefly that Plato banished it out of the Republic. To the first objection, Sidney replies that there is no other learning that teaches and moves to virtue better than poetry. To the second objection, Sidney replies that poet is the “least liar” (p.132) of all, because he never affirms as the other professions do, and therefore never lies. In addition, the poet never limits our imagination, telling you what you should believe or what is true and what isn’t, but rather what should be and what shouldn’t be. In defence of the third objection, Sidney states that it is not Poetry which abuses man’s

wit, but that man's wit abuses poetry. Furthermore, Sidney puts forward the analogy that: with the sword you can both kill your father and defend your country. To the objection that poetry has subverted the ethos of the English nation from action to imagination, and from doing things worthy to be written, to writing things worthy to be done; Sidney replies that in fact poetry is "the companion of the camps" (p.135). In other words, Sidney says that poetry is the friend of warfare, action and virtue. In Sidney view we are mistaking about Plato, because he only wanted to "drive out those wrong opinions of the Deity" (p.137), that is "banishing the abuse, not the thing not banishing it, but giving due honour unto it, shall be our patron and not our adversary." (p.137). Furthermore, he has honoured poetry in *Ion*. He considers "full evil" (p.138) the fact that Plato, through the mouth of Socrates attacked poetry, because Socrates spent his last days in prison putting "Aesop's fables into verses" (p.138).

Sidney proceeds with discussing the condition of poetry in England and why his country has become a hard stepmother to poets. He finds the biggest fault in "base men with servile wits" (p.139) undertake writing and publishing poetry and so "by their own disgracefulness, disgrace the most graceful poetry". He further laments the fact that English Tragedies and Comedies, observe "rules neither of honest civility nor of skilful Poetry" (p.140). It is also Sidney's recommendation that we should believe that the poets were "first bringers-in of all civility" (p.147)-according to Bembus, to believe "that no philosopher's precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the treading of Virgil" (p.147)-according to Scaliger, and that "under the veil of fables" (p.147) gives us all knowledge -according to Hesiod and Homer. According to Phillip Sidney, "there are many mysteries contained in Poetry" (p.147) which were purposely written "darkly" (p.147), so as not to be abused by the "profane wits" (p.147), and to believe ourselves when "they tell you they will make you immortal by their verses" (p.147).

The last major work from this period that dealt with poetry and stage plays was Phillip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583). Stubbs includes a chapter on the immorality of stage-plays and interludes. According to Stubbs the immorality of the plays is due to their association with the heathen, the Devil and the Vice in the miracle and morality plays. In his opinion "to worship Devils and betray Christ Jesus" (A critical edition of Phillip Stubbs' *Anatomy of Abuses*, p.239), can hardly be beneficial for a society.

Concluding remarks: An outline of the attitudes to poetry would be far from complete if it doesn't include a quotation by the foremost representative of dramatic poetry, and of poetry in general, William Shakespeare. In *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, through the mouth of Theseus, Shakespeare, sheds light on the nature of the poet:

"The lunatic, the lover and the poet  
Are of imagination all compact:  
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold,  
That is, the madman: the lover, all as frantic,  
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt:  
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
And as imagination bodies forth  
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.  
Such tricks hath strong imagination,  
That if it would but apprehend some joy,

It comprehends some bringer of that joy;  
Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!"

(Act V, scene I, lines 8-23)

Shakespeare equates the poet, with regard to imagination and creativity with the lunatic and the lover. This is an ancient equation, due to the fact that Plato described imagination as a gift of God, stating "in fact the best things we have comes from madness" (Phaedrus), and that in the classical world "love at first sight" was supposed to derive from *theia mania* or divine madness. Shakespeare calls this creative process accompanied with "frenzy" as "tricks having strong imagination". In Theseus' view, the crux with regard to poets and imagination is that humans with poetic inclinations tend to overemphasize certain emotions. Thus, by looking at something positive, the result would be an overflow of positive feelings, or the reverse with regard to something that is negative. The common thread that connects: Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Horace, the Renaissance critics and Shakespeare is the effect of poetry on the emotions. The difference is that the ancient looked at the emotions through philosophical lenses, namely emotions vs reason, whereas the Renaissance critics looked from Christian perspective, namely the choice between uncomely emotions versus humility before God. William Wordsworth in the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, which can be regarded as the manifest of Romantic movement, has also described poetry in terms of emotions. Wordsworth defines poetry as: "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquillity gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind" (Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads* (2005, p. 251,). Perhaps the best precept on how to avoid the pitfalls and reap the benefits with regard to poetry, comes from Wordsworth himself. For Wordsworth, "an accurate taste in poetry" is "an *acquired* talent, which can only be produced by a severe thought and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition" (Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 2005, p. 8).

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